

The collapse of great political parties on the continent



<https://johnredwoodsdiary.com/>

When I wrote my book about populism a few weeks ago I drew a contrast between the long trends on the continent to the demise of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in most places, and the recovery of support for Conservative and Labour in the 2017 election. In February this year as I sent it to the printers the Conservatives were on a healthy 43% in the polls. The reason was simple. The Conservatives had embraced the Brexit verdict and we were on target to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. It seemed very likely the Withdrawal Agreement would not be passed, as it was extremely unpopular with much of the electorate, uniting Remain and Leave voters against. Implementing a timely and clean Brexit could lead on to other changes that would be welcome – spending the money on our priorities including some tax cuts with more spending on schools and social care, boosting the economy, developing our own global trade policy, setting out our own borders policy and restoring our fishing grounds.

Mrs May's decision to delay our exit and to blame Parliament led to a big fall in Conservative poll ratings. Her even worse decision to hold the European Parliamentary elections, three years after our decision to leave, led to a further slump in Conservative poll ratings. People write in and tell me I have to solve this problem. I need to do something.

My remedy is simple. We need a government that will go to the EU and explain the Withdrawal Agreement is completely unacceptable to Parliament and people, and cannot pass. We will leave at the first opportunity – October 31 if the EU does not co-operate or earlier if they will co-operate. We will offer free trade talks and no new barriers to our trade on exit if they agree under Gatt Article 24. It would be better to leave with such a deal than with just the various smaller deals we have in place for a so called no deal exit.

That is all the easy bit. I will continue to argue and vote for that in Parliament. That is entirely in line with what I promised I would do in the General election, and with the Conservative party Manifesto of 2017. The difficult bit is how to get the government to do just that, as it shows no wish to save itself at the moment.

I have made clear my wish to see Mrs May either change her policy in the way described or to give way to a PM who can do the job. If the Conservatives do not deliver a clean Brexit soon the polls will stay bad for the party and the country will continue to feel let down. I on my own do not have the power to get these changes, and nor so far does anyone else. That is what these days are about – trying to get the change we need.

The immediate future of Brexit rests on a Conservative Prime Minister and will continue to rest on a Conservative PM until the end of this Parliament at least. Any individual MP resigning the Conservative whip would not bring about the change many of you want, but would make achieving such change one vote less likely.

The book is

“We don’t believe you”

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[Reply from the Brexit Secretary and my response](#)

I have received a reply from the Brexit Secretary following to my recent letter to the Attorney General. The letter is available to view [here](#).

Here is my further response to the Secretary of State:

Dear Stephen

Thank you for your letter.

You say the Withdrawal Agreement takes us out of the EU, yet you also agree with me that we may well stay fully in without vote or voice under it until December 2022, and you cannot of course tell me what our eventual departure would be like given how much would need to be negotiated over the so called future partnership. There would also need to be resolution of the alleged Irish border difficulties which so far have proved impossible to resolve despite lengthy talks.

I am glad we agree we could be fully under the control of the EU until December 2022 and would have to accept all new rules and laws. I do not accept that these will be few in number and limited by our possible departure. The EU is a very active legislature, generating a large proportion of our laws over everything from the environment to trade and from migration to transport.

I am intrigued that you think £35-39 bn a small sum, and that the Treasury forecasts of our gross contributions now amount to an annual £16.7bn. One of the main advantages of leaving as was clear in the referendum is the ability to spend our own money on our priorities, which we should be able to do from now, 3 years after our decision to leave.

In a number of areas you point out that the continuing powers of the ECJ and the EU relate to events or commitments made during the transition period. I and many others object to this. Leaving means ending the authority of the EU, not allowing it to interpret past events and impose continuing obligations upon us.

You confirm we will not take control of our fishing grounds during the transition period of the Agreement, nor can you promise that the independence

of our fishing industry thereafter might not be compromised in subsequent negotiations to get out of the EU in due course.

The splitting of the Withdrawal issues from the future partnership issues is against our Manifesto and full of negotiating danger. Why should we sign up to so many things they want, before we have agreed some of the things we might want? Why have we dropped the mantra of "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed?". What exactly do we get for our £39bn (and the higher sums likely to result from the loose and general commitments of the Treaty) in this so called deal?

The Agreement is a very expensive invitation to talks about our possible exit. It does not give us either a clear date for leaving or the terms on which we might eventually be allowed out. It locks us into a binding Treaty to behave as a continuing member of the EU without vote or voice over what we have to obey whilst we try to negotiate our way out of the Irish backstop and the other restraints on us.

Yours ever

John

[A better railway](#)

The current railway is effectively a nationalised industry. Its main assets the tracks, stations and signalling system are all in public ownership. The train companies are heavily regulated and have to conform to timetables agreed by government and constrained by what track capacity the nationalised business cares to make available. One of the results of public ownership is a restrictive and unhelpful approach to managing railway property.

It is true that at last the industry has got round to transforming some of the large London stations with retail and service improvements, and to one or two of the prize City properties outside London like Birmingham New Street. Meanwhile much of the rest of the network fails to exploit the obvious opportunities to redevelop station properties to create proper transport interchanges with bus, taxi and private vehicles, and fails to develop the retail and service opportunities. Worse than the failure to initiate, the railway often blocks, delays or prices out suggestions from others to improve or develop general railway property anywhere on the extensive estate.

As a train traveller I often look out on a bleak landscape of disused sidings, weed strewn derelict property, surplus land, under developed and old stations. The railway itself is one of the main barriers to a better road system requiring expensive bridges to get roads across. Too many level crossings present a safety issue to the railway as well as creating big delays for road traffic. Better investment schemes could include more bridges

to get traffic safely over the lines. In Wokingham the railway blocked my proposals for a new station using private money funded by some private development of retail and café facilities on public land, only for them eventually to give into pressure to build a new station, using public money without much increase in service.

Harnessing more private capital and re uniting track and trains would assist in creating a more positive atmosphere for station and property development. Kings Cross and St Pancras show what can be done on a grand scale when private sector services are allowed to flourish alongside the train service. Much more could be done elsewhere.

The railway review also needs to consider how ticketing and ticket pricing could be improved. The multiplicity of tickets from conventional paper through printed out pieces of paper to electronic tickets on smart phones can cause delays and complications getting through automatic ticket barriers. The range of prices turns buying a ticket into a kind of lottery, where you could pay anything from a low price bargain to a very high price penalty style fare depending on time of day, route and timing of your purchase of the ticket. There is little flexibility so if on the day you wish to travel by a different train your surcharge for switching can be disproportionate even where you are switching to a relatively empty alternative train. The heavily discounted bargain tickets bought in advance for non peak travel cannot represent a good deal for the train operator, whilst the penal high fares for a peak period journey bought the same day is certainly not value for the passenger. The fare structure is an assault course for the unwary, with great complexity leading to difficulties or discouraging potential passengers.

[Letter to Brexit Secretary about the Withdrawal Agreement Bill \(WAB\)](#)

Dear Stephen

I understand the government is considering putting the Withdrawal Agreement Bill to the Commons for a vote on the principles of the Bill following a Second Reading debate. Indeed we were all told to be ready to answer a 3 line whip for this purpose on Thursday, only for this to be postponed.

I understand this is a long and complex piece of constitutional legislation which will require careful study by all those asked to improve or approve it. I would therefore urge you again to publish this Bill as soon as possible so MPs can have an intelligent debate about what it is seeking to do and how it might try to do that. Why the delay in releasing a piece of legislation for scrutiny which the government claims is so important. It must have been drafted for some time, as the draft Agreement it seeks to implement has been settled for many weeks and is not subject to renegotiation according to both

the government and the EU.

The legislation presumably seeks to repeal much of the EU Withdrawal Act and will reintroduce the European Communities Act 1972 into the UK constitution to restore all EU powers for a flexible and long transitional period and maybe beyond that. It needs to make provision for the substantial sums of money the draft Agreement commits the UK to pay and for the imposition of new EU law upon the UK. It needs to confirm the powers of the Joint Committee and European Court of Justice in making important decisions about our future government and resolving disputes between the UK and the EU. These are all weighty matters which warrant proper consideration by MPs before any debate and vote on them.

The Bill could be more accurately called the "Delay our exit from the EU " Bill, or " The Reimposition of EU powers "Bill given the requirements of the draft Withdrawal Treaty. The Bill itself would of course need to conform precisely with the Treaty, as the Treaty will be binding in European law anyway.

Yours ever

John

[Earley St Peter's 175th anniversary](#)

I was invited to St Peter's Church Earley on Sunday afternoon. The local clergy and the Bishop of Oxford led a service of thanksgiving and commemoration of 175 years of community involvement by the Church. Quite early in its life it helped launch the popular St Peter's School next door. Pupils were present at the service and sang to the congregation.

I thank all involved in organising an excellent service and tea party, and am grateful to the Church and its helpers for all they do for the local community.